

Message Text

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ACTION AF-04

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4779

C O N F I D E N T I A L LIBREVILLE 0593

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, GB

SUBJ: VISIT OF PRESIDENT BONGO TO US

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY NEWSON AND AF/C COHEN

REF: STATE 140560; LIBREVILLE 0591

1. IN LONG CONVERSATION AFTERNOON JULY 18 BONGO EXPLAINED TO ME THAT FOR DOMESTIC REASONS IT VERY IMPORTANT TO HIM THAT HIS VISIT TO U.S. BE BILLED HERE IN GABON AS OFFICIAL. THIS WILL BE HIS FIRST VISIT TO U.S. AS SUCH (VISIT TO NEW YORK IN 1970 WAS TO UN ONLY) AND HE WANTS TO DEMONSTRATE SOLIDITY OF U.S./GABONESE FRIENDSHIP. TIES BETWEEN GABON AND FRANCE WELL KNOWN, BONGO EXPLAINED, BUT GABON DOES NOT WANT THEM TO BE EXCLUSIVE AND HE VERY ANXIOUS TO SHOW THAT HIS COUNTRY OPEN TO ALL, PARTICULARLY U.S.

2. I EXPLAINED CAREFULLY TO THE PRESIDENT THAT FOLLOWING A NUMBER OF DISCUSSIONS WITH FOREIGN MINISTER RAWIRI, BEGINNING WITH MEETING IN NEW YORK IN 1971, WE UNDERSTOOD THAT BONGO HAD IN MIND PRIVATE VISIT DURING WHICH HE WOULD MAKE OFFICE
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CALL ONLY ON PRESIDENT NIXON. WHILE IT MIGHT BE

POSSIBLE PRESENT VISIT IN GABON AS OFFICIAL
I SAID IT MOST UNLIKELY PRESIDENT NIXON'S SCHEDULE
WOULD PERMIT ANYTHING MORE THAN OFFICE CALL.

3. PRESIDENT BONGO HAD CLEARLY NOT BEEN ADEQUATELY
BRIEFED BY RAWIRI (WHO CURRENTLY IN FRANCE) AND
HOPED FOR OFFICIAL VISIT INCLUDING FULL HONORS
AND DINNER AT WHITE HOUSE. HE ASKED THAT I CONVEY
HIS FEELINGS TO WASHINGTON, STRESSING SYMBOLIC
IMPORTANCE THIS FIRST VISIT IN TERMS U.S./GABONESE RELATIONS.
I SAID THAT WHILE HE COULD OF COURSE PASS UP THIS
OPPORTUNITY, I BELIEVED IT WOULD BE TO HIS ADVANTAGE
TO MAKE TRIP NOW RATHER THAN WAIT FOR MORE ELABORATE
VISIT WHICH MIGHT NOT BE POSSIBLE FOR VERY LONG TIME.

4. AFTER FURTHER LENGTHY DISCUSSION OF VARIOUS
ASPECTS OF TRIP, I BECAME CONVINCED THAT WHILE BONGO
EXPECTED MUCH MORE, HE ANXIOUS TO STICK WITH DATE
AND WILL SETTLE FOR BEST WE CAN DO FOR HIM PROVIDED
WE MAKE SOME EFFORT TO DRESS UP VISIT.

5. BELIEVE THAT IF BONGO CAN CALL VISIT OFFICIAL
HERE AND IF HE CAN BE MET AT AIRPORT AT ASSISTANCE
SECRETARY LEVEL AND HAVE LUNCHEON HOSTED BY SECRETARY
THIS WOULD LARGELY MEET PROBLEM. HOPEFULLY ARRIVALS
AT AIRPORT IN WASHINGTON AND AT WHITE HOUSE CAN BE
ACCOMPANIED BY A LITTLE POMP. IT WOULD BE IDEAL
IF BONGO COULD BE LODGED AT BLAIR HOUSE NIGHTS OF
AUGUST 1 AND 2.

6. I HAVE SO FAR MADE NO REPEAT NO COMMITMENTS, BUT
BONGO HAS ASKED ME URGENTLY FOR WASHINGTON VIEWS
ON WHAT WE PREPARED TO DO FOR HIM. WOULD THEREFORE
APPRECIATE EARLIEST POSSIBLE CONFIRMATION OF WHAT
I CAN TELL HIM. I REALIZE THAT THIS LATEST
DEVELOPMENT COMES AS UNPLEASANT SURPRISE FOR ALL OF
US BUT HOPE VERY MUCH WE CAN MAKE EXTRA EFFORT
NECESSARY TO MAKE VISIT SUCCESSFUL.
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